

HOW TO... Format paragraphs

Make your documents smarter and easier to read with some clever paragraph formatting. Jennifer Bagley shows you how to knock those text files into shape

Text-heavy documents can be unattractive, but applying some basic effects can make them much more readable. Built into most word processors are a number of basic tools you might associate with a desktop publishing package. We show you how to get more from the Paragraph functions in Word 2003, Ability Write 3 and Star Office 7.

1 Most paragraphs have an indentation on the first line. First, place the cursor anywhere in the paragraph you want to indent and select Paragraph from the Format menu. In Word, click in the Special box in the Indentation section of the dialog box. From the drop-down menu that appears, select First line. You can see how this will look in the Preview window at the bottom of the dialog box. Use the By box to adjust how far the first line is indented. In Star Office, adjust the setting in the box next to First Line. Ability users can make this adjustment using the Indent box, under Margins.

2 You can have the top line justified to the left of the page, with all the subsequent lines indented. Go to Format, Paragraph. In Word, click in the Special box and select Hanging. In Star Office, use the Before Text box to indent all the lines in the paragraph, then return the first line to its original position by entering a negative number in the First Line box. In Ability, adjust the setting in the Left box, under Margins.

3 There are other options in the dialog box that opens when you select Format, Paragraph. In all three programs, you can use this

box to centre, justify and align text to the left- or right-hand margin. The preview will show the effect. To place a gap between each paragraph, you could press the Return key twice. There is a more elegant way to do this, however. From the Edit menu click on Select All, or press Ctrl-A. Go to Format, Paragraph. Adjust the setting in the Before or After box, or both if you prefer. This will adjust the amount of white space that appears between paragraphs in your document.

4 Placing a border or effect around an important paragraph can add interest to text, particularly in a long document. We'll show you how to do this by placing a drop shadow behind a paragraph. Place the cursor inside the paragraph to which you want the effect applied. Star Office and Ability users can skip to Step 5.

In Word, go to Format, Borders and Shading. On the Borders tab, click on the Shadow button under Settings, on the left-hand side. To create a deeper shadow, select a thicker line in the Width box. While this makes the shadow deeper, it also makes the border thicker around the paragraph. Sadly, there is no way to remove the outline.

To just give the paragraph a lift, try this. Click on Custom, the last option under Settings. Select the thickness you want in the Width box then, on the far right, click on the bottom and right-hand buttons only. This applies the lines just to those parts of the paragraph.

5 Star Office has a more flexible Shadow border effect. Go to Format, Paragraph and click on the Borders tab. In the Shadow Style section, click on the second button next to

Position. This will place the shadow to the bottom and right of the paragraph without any outlining around the text.

Ability doesn't have a Shadow option. There is a workaround similar to Word's, though. Go to Format, Borders. Click on the button next to Line Style and select a suitable thickness. Then click on the button with the thick bottom line (the last button on the bottom row next to Border Style). Click on the button with the line on the right-hand side. The preview makes this appear as though the effect is applied to the entire page, but it isn't. The lines appear only around the paragraph in which the insertion point is placed.

6 When you look at magazine articles, you'll find the first letter of the first paragraph is often a lot larger than the rest of the text. This is called a drop cap. It will go over several lines, but it won't disrupt the line spacing of the paragraph. Both Word and Star Office have a drop cap tool, but this feature is missing from Ability.

In Word, select Drop Cap from the Format menu. Choose the type of drop cap you want. It is possible to adjust the number of lines it spans and how far it appears from the text.

The drop cap tool in Star Office is more powerful. Select Format, Paragraph and go to the Drop Caps tab. Tick the box next to Display drop caps. To apply this effect to the entire first word, tick the box next to Whole Word. It is even possible to apply a drop cap effect to a selected number of letters in the sentence. You can do this by adjusting the setting in the Number of Characters box. You need to untick the Whole Words box first, though. **CS**

